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Cape Lookout

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cape Lookout National Seashore
North Carolina



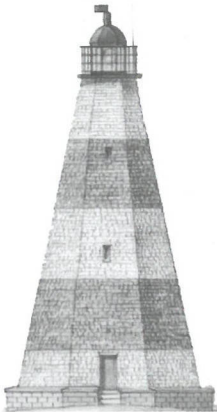
Cape Lookout Lighthouse - For Kids



Early sailors knew of the dangers of Lookout Shoals. Shoals are areas in the ocean where the water is shallow. It was easy to wreck a ship in this area.

In fact, the coast of North Carolina is called the Graveyard of the Atlantic. This is because so many ships have sunk off the coast of this state. Lighthouses were built on the coast to warn ships about unsafe areas.

The First Lighthouse



The first Cape Lookout Lighthouse was built in 1812. It was a brick tower but the outside was covered in wood. The wood was painted with red and white stripes. The lighthouse was 107 feet tall. The light from this tower could be seen 12 miles away.

It was built to warn sailors that they needed to be careful. But, this lighthouse was too short and the light was not strong enough to be seen very far. One Navy captain complained that you could hit the shore before you saw the light. It was not a very effective warning light.

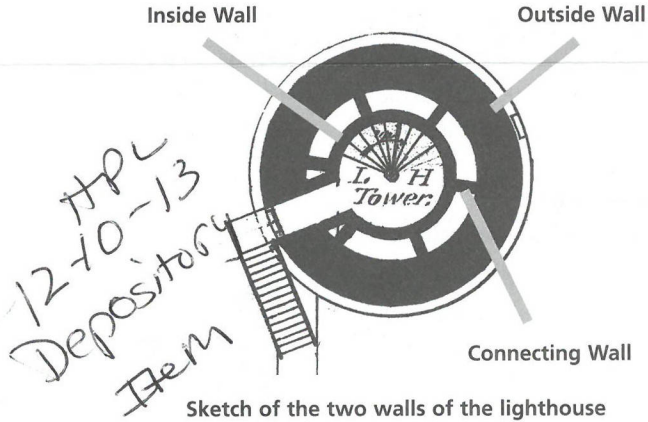


A shipwreck in rough water

The Second Lighthouse



A second Cape Lookout Lighthouse was built in 1859. This tower was much taller. The light could be seen 18 miles out to sea on a clear day. As technology improved, the light could be seen farther out to sea.

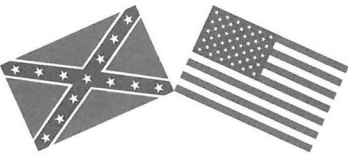


This lighthouse was also the first of this new style to be built in North Carolina. The lighthouse looks solid but it is not. It has two walls with space in between. This means that the lighthouse could be built taller without falling over.

Fast Facts

Year current lighthouse completed	1859
Year painted with daymark pattern	1873
Year automated	1950
Year transferred to the NPS	2003
Height above ground level	163 feet
Wall thickness at the base	9 feet
Wall thickness at the top	1 foot 7 inches
Number of steps	216
Number of steps to the gallery	207
Number of stair landings	7
Number of windows	10
Number of doors	2
Light is produced by two airport beacons	
Each bulb is as strong as 800,000 candles	
Distance light seen out to sea	20 miles
Light color	white
Light flash pattern: 1 flash every 15 seconds	

Civil War Raid



The first fight of the Civil War took place at Fort Sumter in April 1861. Soon after, all the lighthouses on the North Carolina coast were dark. This was done to keep the Union from using the lights to sail south.

But, the Union took over most of the coast within one year. They decided to light the lighthouses. The Confederacy did not want the Union to use these lights.

In April 1864, a small group of soldiers made a plan. They decided to blow up the Cape Lookout Lighthouse. They snuck on to the island at night. There was a big explosion.

The blast burned the oil used to power the light and broke some of the stairs. The lighthouse was still standing, but the Union had to pay for repairs.

Lighthouse Keepers



Historic keeper and wife costumes

The people who were responsible for keeping the light on were called Keepers. The Keepers had a lot of work to do. They had to carry oil cans that weighed 45 pounds to the top of the lighthouse. They had to clean all the glass windows and lenses. They had to make sure the light stayed on all night and in daytime storms. They also had to sweep the steps, paint the lighthouse, paint their house, grow their own food, and feed their cows, sheep, chickens, and other animals.



The kids of Keeper Willis often helped with chores.

Luckily, the Keeper’s family helped with these chores. Younger kids might help sweep stairs or feed animals. Older kids and wives might keep the light burning when the Keeper was sick or away.

Keeper M. W. Mason’s daughter, Charlotte, would help him take care of the light. Later, she worked as one of the two Assistant Keepers. Charlotte was the only woman to have a job as a keeper at Cape Lookout.



Keeper Charlotte Mason

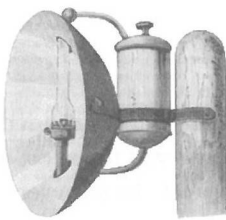
Once it was automated, the lighthouse did not need as much care. The Coast Guard Station two miles south of the lighthouse took over for the Keepers. Today, the Fort Macon Coast Guard Station is in charge of the light.

Powering the Light

Today, we use electricity to turn on lights. Two hundred years ago, people used oil to light lamps. Many things have been used to keep the lighthouse burning bright.



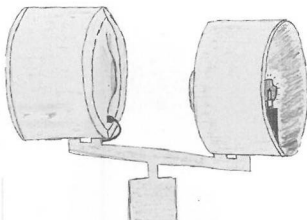
Oil Can



Argand Lamp



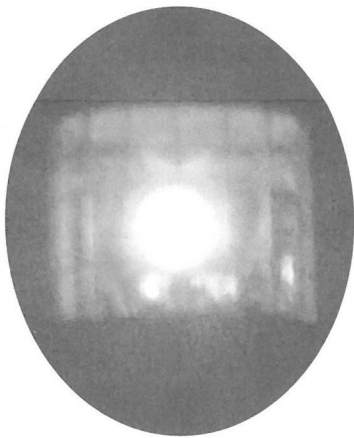
IOV Lantern



Airport Beacons (light bulbs)

At first, people used whale oil to power the lighthouse. Later, they used kerosene, which is also called mineral oil. Today, a power cable from Harkers Island gives power to the light.

Daymarks and Flash Patterns



Lighthouses warned sailors away from unsafe areas. They also helped ships tell where they were on the coast.

Lighthouses were given different “light characteristics.” This meant that each light was given a color and flash pattern. Some lights were green and fixed (no blinking). Other lights were red and flashed (blinked) several times a minute. The Cape Lookout Lighthouse has changed patterns over the years. Today, the light flashes once every 15 seconds. The light color is white.

Which Lighthouse is Which?

Match these lighthouse names to their pictures. Write the letter next to the lighthouse’s name under the matching picture.

- A. Cape Lookout Lighthouse
- B. Ocracoke Lighthouse
- C. Cape Hatteras Lighthouse
- D. Bodie Island Lighthouse
- E. Currituck Lighthouse

The lights were not usually turned on during the day. So, lighthouses were painted with their own patterns. These patterns are called daymarks. Daymarks help sailors know which lighthouse they are looking at during the day.

The Cape Lookout Lighthouse is painted with checkers, or diamonds. The Ocracoke Lighthouse is white. The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse has spirals. The Bodie Island Lighthouse has stripes. The Currituck Lighthouse was never painted so it is still the color of red bricks.

